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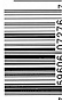
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STEPHEN THE DARK TOWER ~THE GUNSLINGER~ KING

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THE WAY STATION

STEPHEN THE DARK KNIGHT TOWER

CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
STEPHEN KING

PLOT AND CONSULTATION
ROBIN FURTH

SCRIPT
PETER DAVID

ARTIST
**LAURENCE
CAMPBELL**

COLOR ART
**RICHARD
ISANOVE**

LETTERING
VC'S **JOE
SABINO**

COVER
LAURENCE CAMPBELL & RICHARD ISANOVE

EDITOR IN CHIEF
AXEL ALONSO

PRODUCTION
MAYELA GUTIERREZ

VICE PRESIDENT OF CREATIVE
TOM MARVELLI

ASSISTANT EDITOR
JON MOISAN

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES & PUBLISHING
DAVID GABRIEL

CONSULTING EDITOR
RALPH MACCHIO

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT
RUWAN JAYATILLEKE

EDITOR
SANA AMANAT

CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER
JOE QUESADA

PUBLISHER
DAN BUCKLEY

SPECIAL THANKS TO CHUCK VERRILL, MARSHA DEFILIPPO, BARBARA ANN MCINTYRE, BRIAN STARK,
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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain is the last gunslinger of the line of Arthur Eld. His quest is the pursuit of the elusive Man in Black who Roland will force to bring to the Dark Tower itself.

His travels have taken him to many strange places, most recently Tull, a town whose residents Roland was forced to kill to stay alive as they attacked him en masse.

Now, as he crosses the endless Mohaine desert, the gunslinger believes he has sighted the Man in Black. But that may only have been an illusion, as the exhausted Roland collapses not at the feet of his quarry, but rather at those of a boy brandishing a pitchfork...

The first thing Roland becomes aware of, as he wakes up, is the pile of light, odorless hay under his head.

That and the fact that he feels cool, his shirt dark and wet.

He licks his lips, and when he speaks, his voice is raspy.

Someone tried to give me water. I can taste it on my mouth.

That was me, sir.

Kind of dribbled out sideways.

Is someone hitting me on the head with a rock at the moment?

Uh... no.

Ah, it's from the inside of my skull, then.

I'll take more of that water now.

You could have killed me while I was unconscious.

Uh... should I have?

Let's hope not.

A black and white comic panel showing a man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark jacket, drinking from a metal can. He is looking down at the can.

Sad to say, Roland knows what he's talkin' about.

Not that the boy faces any danger from Roland himself. Not so long as he don't pose a threat, leastways.

Still, it's hard to deny the fact that folks drawn into Roland's orbit tend to have a nasty habit of, well...

...dying.

Good, bad, innocent or demon, makes no difference. There's morticians with fewer bodies to their credit than Roland, do ya kenne?

For his own long-term safety, the boy might've been better off shoving his rake through Roland's skull.

A black and white comic panel showing the same man from the previous panel, still drinking from the can. A young boy with dark hair and a beard is looking at him. The man is looking down at the can.

But he didn't, and so things are what they are.

Would you want something to eat, sir?

Not yet.

Not till the pounding in my head from the sunstroke eases up...

A black and white comic panel showing a close-up of the man and the boy. The man is on the left, looking towards the boy on the right. The boy is looking back at the man.

...and let's see if the water stays down.

Who are you?

My name is John Chambers.



You
can call me
Jake.

I have a
friend--well,
sort of a friend,
she works for
us--who calls
me 'Bama
sometimes.

But you
can call me
J--

*There's no conversation
stopper quite like heaving
the contents of your
stomach all over the floor.*

Usually.

You gonna
need more
water?

yes,
please.

Sorry
about, uh...

No
problem.

It's just
hay. Not like
I have to mop
it up.



Boy looks to be ten, maybe eleven...twelve, if he's small for his age.

Has a shadow of fear on his face when he looks at me. That's all right.



Would trust him far less if he *hadn't* shown fear.



Were you talking to someone just now?

No.



You're not from around here. The desert hasn't dried you out yet.



Guess it hasn't, no.

Brought you some food. Dried jerky.

Let's keep the water down, first.



I, uh...I didn't know what to do with you when you fell down. For a couple of seconds there, I thought you were going to shoot me.



Maybe I was. I thought you were somebody else.



The priest?



Priest?

Tell me
about this...
priest.



He camped in
the yard. I didn't
like him, so I didn't
come out. He came
in the night and
went on the
next day.

He didn't even
drink. He had a long,
black robe and a hood,
like a priest did in this
movie I saw once,
with Zorro.

I was scared.
I've been scared
almost all the
time.

He didn't
even build a
fire. He just...
sat there.

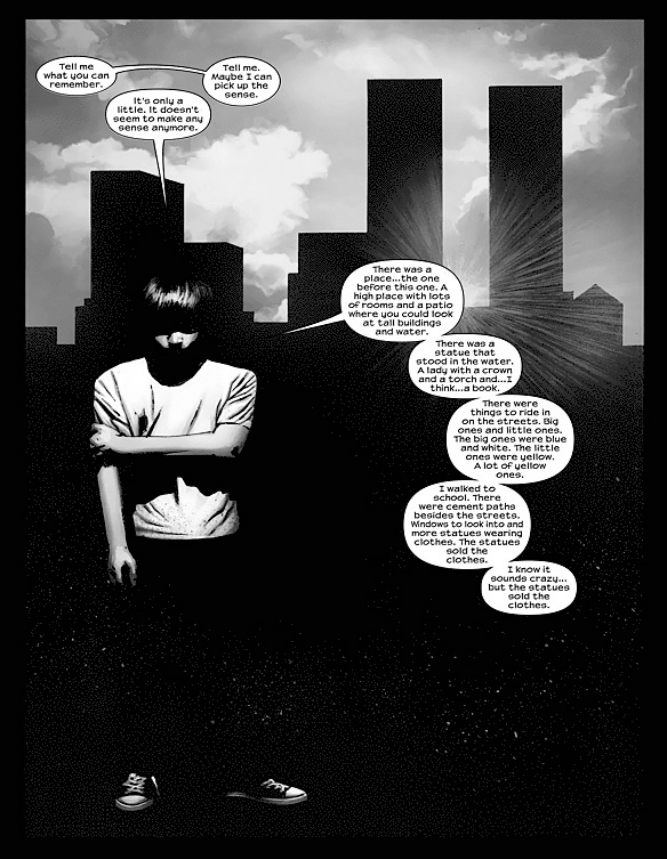


How long
ago? Tell me,
for your father's
sake!

...I...







Tell me
what you can
remember.

It's only a
little. It doesn't
seem to make any
sense anymore.

Tell me.
Maybe I can
pick up the
sense.

There was a
place...the one
before this one. A
high place with lots
of rooms and a patio
where you could look
at tall buildings
and water.

There was a
statue that
stood in the water.
A lady with a crown
and a torch and...I
think...a book.

There were
things to ride in
on the streets. Big
ones and little ones.
The big ones were blue
and white. The little
ones were yellow.
A lot of yellow
ones.

I walked to
school. There
were cement paths
besides the streets.
Windows to look into and
more statues wearing
clothes. The statues
sold the
clothes.

I know it
sounds crazy...
but the statues
sold the
clothes.



*The gunslinger
twirls the shell
in his fingers...*

*...the movement
as dexterous, as
flowing as oil.*



*It pops out of sight,
seems to float, briefly,
then reverse.*

*The boy watches,
his initial doubt
first replaced with
plain delight...*

*...then by
raptress...*



*...then by dawning
blankness.*

*The boy breathes
with slow and steady
calmness.*

*Where are you,
Jake? For that
matter...who are
you? And when?*





"I'm John Chambers. It's May 31st, 1977. I'm finishing my first year at the Piper School. I'm eleven and in the sixth grade."

"I know, I know, I look younger. Used to be worse; I looked like a girl until I got my hair cut a year ago."



"Three or four boys who are almost my friends call me Jake. If my father knew that, he'd probably hit the roof."

"To my father, I'm never Jake and rarely John. To my father, I'm usually just 'the kid.' He'd say stuff like..."



"My kid? Oh, he's going to Piper. Best Panned School in the Country For A Boy His Age."

"The fact is, money won't buy you into that school, you know; For Piper, it's brains or nothing."



"That's his favorite phrase. 'The fact is.'"

The fact is, the only thing that gets you into a place like Piper is what you've got upstairs. Get me, kid?

"I listen, nod in the right places. That's all I have to do, really."

We understand each other then.

"Nod."



You're going to have to work your buttsky off, but you can cut it. They'd never have admitted you if you couldn't.

Nod again. Don't smile; it'll seem fake, which it will be. Look serious. Serious is better."



If you end the year with an A average in your courses, there's a trip to Disney World in it for you.

Work hard. Make your grades. Make your mother and me proud of you.



That's something to shoot for, right, kiddo?

"My father treats everyone-- including my mom--the way he treats the people who work for him at the TV network.

"I've seen them from time to time. He'd bring me around, say 'This is my kid.' They'd nod in the right places and after a while he'd go away.

"That's where I learned it. So I nod a few more times.



"He goes away.

"Twenty-three minutes from now, I will, too."



"I don't really think I'm going to Disney World this summer. A average or no. The nuthouse seems a much more likely possibility."



"Funny. I'm already getting A's in everything. But my father and mother are hardly ever around, so they probably don't even know."



"Usually I wind up showing my A papers to Greta Shaw, the housekeeper."



"She makes me the same lunch every day: a peanut butter and jelly sandwich; a bologna, lettuce and onion sandwich; and four Oreo cookies."

"I tell her goodbye. That I'm going to school now."



"Have a good day, Johnny."



"No Bama today. Maybe tomorrow, I think, not realizing my tomorrow ends in eighteen minutes."

"People have always
bewildered me."

"My mother seems kind of scrawny, but
I heard one of my dad's friends say it
was 'in a sexy way,' and apparently she
often goes to bed with sick friends."

"My father talks about people at
The Network who are doing 'too
much Coca-Cola.' Then he sort of
laughs, but doesn't, and gives a
quick little sniff of the thumbnail."



"I've been told I'm clean and
well-mannered and sensitive. I
bowl once a week at Mid-Town
Lanes. My average is 158."



"Funny how these meaningless
things seem to have meaning."



"Funny *strange*,
not funny ha-ha."



"I take an Oreo
cookie out of
my bag."

"If I'd known I only have
two hundred and seventy
seconds left to live, I'd
have started five blocks
ago and eaten all four."



"I've been here before. This has already happened...will keep happening."



"A mannequin is trying to sell me clothes in a professional manner. I hate professionals."



"It doesn't care my death is coming. Why should it?"



"But that man with the hat....he'll care. That man will be the one that yells."



"Oh my God, he's kill! Just like that. Kill." Like I've turned into a Scots skirt.



"And a fat woman will drop her bag and put her hands to her mouth and scream."

DONT
WALK



"And a tall man will drop his briefcase and throw up on his shoes."



"It's like being locked into a nightmare where things simply take their course."



"Now I have eighteen seconds left, and I'm screaming at myself, 'Run!' And if you can't run, sit down and grab hold of a No Parking Sign! Don't just let it happen!"

"A Donna Summer song is just ending on the boom box. Next up will be 'Dr. Love' by Kiss."

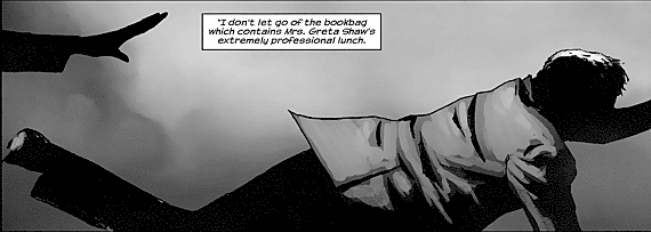


"Two... one..."

DONT
WALK



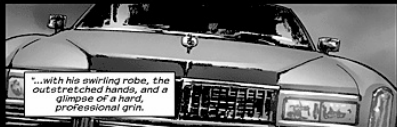
*'And I see the man
who kills me out the
corner of my eye...*



*'I don't let go of the bookbag
which contains Mrs. Greta Shaw's
extremely professional lunch.*



*...and I think, 'This is
how it ends? Before
I've bowled better
than a 270?'*



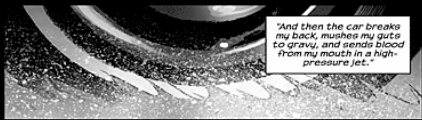
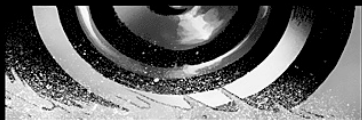
"...with his swirling robe, the outstretched hands, and a glimpse of a hard, professional grin.



"A brief glance of the horrified face of a businessman...



"...and a woman who looks dressed to mourn...



"And then the car breaks my back, mashes my guts to gravel, and sends blood from my mouth in a high-pressure jet."



*"Curiously, I'm wondering
if I've skinned my knees
and, if so, how badly."*



*"And there's everyone,
playing their part..."*



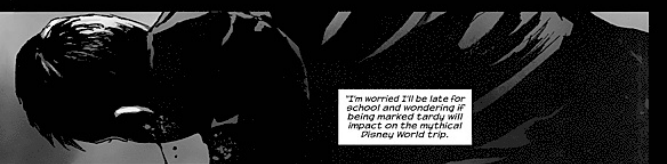
*"...just as they're
supposed to..."*



"The car also runs over my bookbag, leaving a wide, black tread on it."



"Blood's running from my nose, ears, eyes, out my ass. My genitals have been squashed."



"I'm worried I'll be late for school and wondering if being marked tardy will impact on the mythical Disney World trip."



"...just as I have..."



"...just as we all do, no matter how sick it makes us to do so."



"And then there's
that voice..."



"...that
horrible..."

"...calm...
voice."



I am a
priest. Let me
through.

An act of
Contrition.



"My last act in that
world is to turn away
from my killer."



"I admire my fingernails
and the fact that I've
never, ever bitten them."

"Looking at my
hand, I die."



JAKE CHAMBERS

I still remember the first time I read *The Gunslinger*. I was sitting on the living room sofa, my feet curled under me, a cup of steaming tea on the table to my left. Beyond the window it was snowing so heavily that radio announcers were urging their listeners to stay in their houses. Schools were cancelled, and every business in town had closed its doors. Outside there were white-out conditions, and driving was treacherous. The wind blew, and the lights in the house flickered. My husband called to me from the kitchen—we should fill jugs with water since we were probably in for another long electricity blackout—but I don't think I even heard him. I was far, far away, trudging across the desiccated, sun-baked Mohaine Desert with Roland Deschain. Roland had just spied the Way Station, and was now lunging

toward it in a jolting, flat-footed run. Kicking through one of the station's leaning fence rails, Roland lifted his gun, his face a grey death-mask. He was on the verge of collapse, but he'd just spied his quarry, the Man in Black.

"You're covered!" Roland cried. "Hands up, you whoreson, you're—"

I don't think I looked up from my book when Mark, shaking his head, began to fill pans of water in case our pump gave out. Then he took our emergency candles out of the cupboard and began to place them in candleholders.

Back in Mid-World, the Man in Black stood up and Roland—dehydrated, sunblind, his head buzzing with fever—paused, dumb-struck. His enemy had shrunk two-feet and his hair had gone white. But no, the figure standing before him was *not* the Man in Black at all. It was a twelve-year-old boy with sun-bleached hair and blue eyes. Roland shook his head, trying to rid himself of this strange apparition, but the boy—wearing blue jeans with a patch on one knee and a plain brown shirt of rough weave—would not disappear. Reholstering his gun, Roland swayed. A blade of pain slipped through his head and he held out his hands, as if to ward off phantoms. Then he fell over onto his face.

A boy? I thought to myself as I finally put down my book long



enough to help with preparations for an electricity-blackout. A boy in the middle of the Mohaine Desert? How on earth did he get there? In this month's episode of our story, we learn the identity of that mysterious twelve-year-old who suddenly appeared in the middle of the Mohaine, miles and miles from any human habitation, and from any known source of water. His name is Jake Chambers, and of all Roland's later companions, he is my favorite.

When I was a young girl, I was a devoted fan of the *Narnia* books, and was constantly searching for doorways into magical lands. When I read "The Way Station" (Chapter II of *The Gunslinger*), I realized that I had found a more sinister, grown-up version of this tale. Like Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter, Jake leaves an unsatisfying life in our world for an adventure in another reality. But unlike the Pevensie children who walk through a wardrobe into an enchanted forest filled with fauns, talking animals, dwarves and evil witches, Jake ends up in a desert with a dangerous gunslinger. And Jake does not enter this world through a wardrobe. Jake's doorway is death, and there will be no returning home for him. In so many of Stephen King's novels, the strange, the supernatural, or the demonic suddenly erupts into the ordinary world we all know so well. But in *The Gunslinger*, a person with memories of our world lands in an alien and dangerous landscape. Seen through Roland's eyes, our world looks strange, almost fantastical. But for Jake, Roland's world is the afterlife.

Most of this month's comic book focuses on Jake's life, and death, in our world. But as in the original novel, it also subtly juxtaposes Roland's reality with our own. Roland's world — full of deserts, mutants, magic, and dangerous, broken down machinery — is one we've come to know very well. Yet as comic book creators, we had to take the urban world that Jake lives in and make it ever so slightly alien to our

readers. On the one hand, we are showing the familiar landscape of the Big Apple, but on the other, we are using Jake's affluent version of New York City to illustrate the inscape of a twelve-year-old boy who is lonely and dissatisfied with his life, but who — in no way — is ready to die.

As the person responsible for plotting our tale, I knew that I would have to tell the story of Jake's New York life and New York death in great detail. Only by showing the minutia of Jake's previous existence would readers come to know our character and learn what he has lost, and gained, by entering Mid-World. But unfortunately for me, vivid as *The Gunslinger* is, it contains little



visual detail about Jake's previous incarnation. Here's what I mean:

Jake Chambers-sometimes 'Bama-is going downstairs with his bookbag. There is Earth Science, there is Geography, there is a notepad, a pencil, a lunch his mother's cook, Mrs. Greta Shaw, has made for him in the chrome-and-Formica kitchen where a fan whirrs eternally . . . His parents do not hate him, but they do seem to have overlooked him. They have abdicated and left him to Mrs. Greta Shaw, to nannies, to a tutor in the summer and The Piper School (which is Private and Nice, and most of all, White) the rest of the time . . . His father works for The Network, and Jake could pick him out of a line-up of skinny men with crewcuts. Probably . . .

His mother, who is scrawny in a sexy way, often goes to bed with sick friends. His father sometimes talks about people at The Network who are doing

"too much Coca-Cola." This statement is always accompanied by a humorless grin and a quick little sniff of the thumbnail.

. . . His father makes a great deal of money because he is a master of "the kill"-that is, placing a stronger show on his Network against a weaker show on a rival Network. His father smokes four packs of cigarettes a day. His father does not cough, but he has a hard grin, and he's not averse to the occasional shot of the old Coca-Cola . . .

In The Gunslinger we learn a few additional details that play into our present tale, but for the most part, the vivid descriptions of Jake's life come from *The Waste Lands*, which is Book III of the Dark Tower saga.

(I won't tell you how or why we learn more about Jake in that book, since

I don't want to include any spoilers!) In that novel, we see and hear Jake's parents and we have detailed views of his apartment. We learn that Elmer Chambers calls his son "kid," and that he likes Jake's hair to



be short. (He says it makes him look like a little Marine.) We discover that Jake's mother is often in bed when Jake leaves for school, and that she is having an affair with her masseuse. It's Greta Shaw, not Laurie Chambers, who sees Jake's A+ homework when he brings it home from school. We also learn that Jake's father promises Jake trips to Disneyland, but that those trips rarely actually happen.

In *The Gunslinger*, Jake's death is described with an almost poetic brevity. Jake passes by the windows of Bloomingdale's and stares at the "barenaked" manikins. Then he reaches the corner and pauses there, his bookbag at his side. He waits patiently for the cars to stop, but as a blue, 1976 Cadillac roars up, Jake is pushed from behind and he falls into the street:

... he sees the man who kills him out of the corner of his eye. It is the man in black, and he doesn't see the face, only the swirling robe, the outstretched hands, and the hard, professional grin. He falls into the street with his arms outstretched, not letting go of the bookbag which contains Mrs. Greta Shaw's extremely professional lunch . . . He lands hard in the street and looks at an asphalt-sealed crack some two inches from his eyes . . . The car . . . breaks Jake's back, mashes his guts to gravy, and sends blood from his mouth in a high-pressure jet . . . Blood runs from Jake's nose, ears, eyes, rectum. His genitals have been squashed. He wonders irritably how badly he has skinned his knees . . .

In this scene, as in our version of the tale, we glimpse a few of the witnesses to this terrible event: the woman with a black hat that looks like a mourner's veil, the pretzel seller who runs to Jake as he lies dying, the Cadillac's shocked and horrified driver who wears a feathered hat almost the same color as his car. And of course, we see the Man in Black, shouldering his way through the crowd that gathers around the dying boy. "I am a priest. Let me through. An Act of Contrition —"

While Jake's death is described in two-and-a-half packed pages in *The Gunslinger*, in *The Waste Lands* his death scene is expanded to five pages. Unlike *The Gunslinger*, which describes Jake's journey to that fateful corner very briefly, in *The Waste Lands* Stephen King lingers on the details of Jake's sojourn. It is in this version of the story that we see the girl in the white sweater, the young man with a boombox, the woman with a Bloomingdale's bag that splits open, sending a doll, wrapped in a blanket as red as Jake's blood, tumbling onto the street.

And it is in this later book that we learn yet another secret about Jake's killer—the Man in Black. But that, my friends, is a secret you will have to discover for yourselves.

Until next month, long days and pleasant nights!

All the best,
Robin Furth



Illustrations by Stephanie Hans

ART EVOLUTION

Page 16

1. A van with a picture of a happy jumping-jack passes by. On the side of the van is written the words **TOOKER'S WHOLESALE TOYS**. Ahead, on the edge of the curb, is a young woman in a white sweater and a black skirt. To her left is a young Latino man with a boombox.
2. Jake steps between the girl in the white sweater and the man with the boombox. The priest is now less than an arm's distance behind Jake. Down the street, the bright May sunshine twinkles on a Cadillac hood ornament. It is a 1976 Sedan de Ville. (This is the car that will end Jake's life.) The Caddy is speeding up. Jake has six seconds left.
3. The light is about to change, and the driver of the de Ville—a fat man in a blue hat with a feather stuck jauntily in the brim—is speeding up. He wants to scat through the intersection before the light changes. The Man in Black, his black robe swirling around him, is directly behind Jake.

THUMBNAILS BY LAURENCE CAMPBELL



INKS BY LAURENCE CAMPBELL



COLORS BY RICHARD ISANOVE



COVER INKS FOR THE WAY STATION #2 BY LAURENCE CAMPBELL



NEXT: "I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING DOWN THERE."





The Man in Black flees across the desert with the gunslinger Roland in close pursuit. But is it just an illusion? When last we saw Roland, he was seen following the path of the Man in Black to find the Dark Tower and set Mid-World right again. Following the trail, Roland was brought to Tull, a sleepy little town in the middle of the desert, where the sinister power of the Man in Black had taken hold. Barely escaping with his life and leaving a pile of bodies in his wake, Roland has come to the Way Station. But who, or what, waits for him there and what is their connection to the world outside of Mid-World?

From the superstar creative team of Robin Furth, Peter David, Richard Isanove, and Laurence Campbell comes a brand-new story in the saga of the last gunslinger. Superbly mixing fantasy, horror, revenge, and betrayal, a story like this could only come from the mind of master storyteller Stephen King.

PARENTAL ADVISORY
FOR STRONG LANGUAGE & SEXUAL CONTENT

